



BPW Australia

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BPW Australia – taking action for issues affecting women

25th February 2019

Australian Human Rights Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Ms Jenkins

The Australia Federation of Business and Professional Women Inc (known as BPW Australia) welcomes the National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces.

BPW Australia takes action for women's equality at work, on boards and in leadership. Our aims are to advocate for the elimination of all discrimination against women; for human rights and, the use of gender-sensitive perspectives.

In relation to the Terms of Reference for the National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, BPW Australia has provided this submission to address the following elements of the Inquiry:

- the prevalence, nature and reporting of sexual harassment in Australian workplaces
- existing measures and good practice being undertaken by employers in preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment, both domestically and internationally the impacts on individuals and business of sexual harassment, such as mental health, and the economic impacts such as workers compensation claims, employee turnover and absenteeism, and
- recommendations to address sexual harassment in Australian workplaces.

In January 2019, BPW Australia conducted a survey of our members, with participation rate exceeding our expectations, reinforcing your statement of unprecedented appetite for change and turning tide.

We look forward to AHRC recommendations to work together to create a society which is safe and respectful, and where sexual harassment no longer exists.

Yours faithfully

Jacqueline Graham
President 2018-2020
BPW Australia

Angela Tomazos
Director of Policy 2018-2020
BPW Australia

Encl.

Taking action for women's equality: at work, on boards, in leadership



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SUBMISSION BY BPW AUSTRALIA

National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces

BPW Australia canvassed its Members, through a survey in January 2019, as the basis for its submission to the Inquiry.

Key summary of survey findings

Over 25% of BPW Australia's total membership responded to the survey

All respondents agreed to the AHRC definition of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

60% have experienced Sexual Harassment in the workplace

61% were aware of the National Inquiry

71% were aware of their workplace policy/complaint process

54% provided recommendations of desired outcomes

57% have seen and or experienced actions/interventions in workplace to change

32% have had Sexual Harassment impact their career decisions

Two respondents provided deidentified personal experiences

Promising practice and emerging evidence

Our members shared their observations of the shift that is occurring in eliminating Sexual Harassment from the workplace.

50% of the members said that they saw emerging evidence, that had the strength of management role modelling behaviours, and setting policies that were effectively communicated were coming into workplaces. These policies included consequence management (zero tolerance) as well as investing in training and awareness raising.

50% of the members observations were as result of the strength and empowerment of employees to speak up, without consequences, and defining what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Recommendations

1. National Legislation
2. Education in School Systems
3. Whistle Blower policies and enforcement of legislated Acts, e.g. Corporations Act (2001)
4. Consequence Management
5. Independent Complaint Handling regulatory body
6. Reporting obligations for employers on action plans
7. Disciplinary actions, as per company policy and legislation, e.g. Industrial.

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BPW Australia Submission (Cont'd)

Personal Experiences

Both our members experiences included fundamental gender inequality and lack of respect for women.

One experience saw our member subjected to degrading comments in the workplace, which was male dominated. They often had remarks "What is a woman doing on a job site". They had no support to call out unacceptable behaviour. Our member having to speak up for herself.

Our second member witnessed degrading comments and suggestive language due to colleagues being, "pretty" and "smarter".

BPW Australia realises the sensitivity of some women coming forward at this time and would estimate that the very nature of some behaviours in the workplace have not been dealt with and have caused negative outcomes. In not being dealt with, some members have not spoken up. BPW Australia, and its members, hope that this Inquiry will allow their voices to be heard and that it will be a catalyst for change.

Strengthening knowledge & attitudes would see benefits in addressing gaps and greater focus on prevention. Attitudes shape the future; if we can shift an attitude, we can change behaviour.

BPW Australia welcomes the opportunity to submit this Paper to the Inquiry.

End.

For enquiries please contact:

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